DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 221 009 EC 150 033

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TITLE School Achievement and Juvenile Delinquency: A Review of the Literature.
PUB DATE May 82
NOTE 17p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Delinquency; Disabilities; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Learning Disabilities; *Learning Problems; Literature Reviews

ABSTRACT

The paper reviews research investigating the relationship between delinquency and school achievement, with particular emphasis on literature published since 1971. Individual sections address studies on incarcerated youth, the relationship between student track positions and delinquency, the responsibility of schools as a social institution, common etiologies in delinquents and low school achievers, speculations on typology, and proposed educational solutions. Noted among findings are that 42% of the populations in juvenile corrections institutions are comprised of handicapped children as described in P.L. 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act); that a lower incidence of delinquency is found with individuals who participate in extracurricular activities; and evidence shows that social class variables are causal in nature, and the children having certain class characteristics, also identified as learning disabled, should be considered high risk for delinquency. Other findings cited are that academic achievement (particularly in the area of reading) has been associated with delinquent behavior, a lag in neurological development and deficiencies in attention span are evident in students with antisocial behavior disorders, and youth who have a low success rate are very vulnerable to participating in delinquent behavior. Proposed educational solutions include observing caution to avoid labeling children with academic deficiencies as "predelinquent," exploring the creative potential of delinquent children, and augmenting traditional content-ladened lectures with additional visual stimuli. (SW)

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School Achievement and Juvenile Delinquency: A Review of the Literature

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May 1982

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School Achievement and Delinquency

I. Review of Literature Before 1971

Introduction

The first section of this paper is a summary of a search done by Normal E. Silberberg and Margaret C. Silberberg (1971). This review will cover research done on or before February 1971. The second section will be my own hand research on studies after February 1971. The topic review is School Achievement and Juvenile Delinquency.

Historical Background

As far back as the early 1900's many psychologists believed that low intelligence was an important variable in the development of criminal behavior. At that time evaluation was very subjective. It was based on a person's ability to achieve academically and how they behaved socially.

As standardized testing developed, correlational studies were done but they were incorrectly standardized. Goddard had revised the testing instrument but Goodenough in 1954 determined that the mental ages were far too low. This error led people to believe that there was a causal relationship between intelligence and delinquency (Silberberg & Silberberg, p. 17).

A relationship between delinquency and maladaption has been established as early as 1919. Burt (1925) and Healy (1933) both found that in young delinquents, school difficulty often led to truancy and more serious offenses. The Gluecks (1940) did two studies, one in 1934 and one a few years later. They found delinquents to be more retarded academically than were non-delinquents. They also found that delinquents

showed a greater dislike for school subjects requiring strict logical reasoning and persistency of effort as well as those dependent on good memory. Truancy again was the most frequent maladaptive behavior (Silberberg & Silberberg, p. 18).

Reading and Delinquency

There have been many studies done in regards to delinquency and reading disability. Generally speaking, evidence supports a correlation between the two. Studies done by Lane & Witty (1934), Frederick (1936), Sullivan (1927), Hill (1935) and Gates (1936) found that most often, delinquents were retarded in reading (Silberberg & Silberberg, p. 19).

Remedial reading programs appeared to have no long term effects on the reading of normal children (Silberberg & Silberberg, 1969a). However, Dorney (1967) found that adolescent boys who received remedial reading instruction had a lower rate of repeating delinquent behavior than did two control groups. This instruction also appeared to lessen hostile attitudes toward authority figures. Although it is quite accepted that boys outnumber girls in reading problems with ratio ranges from 3:1 to 10:1 (Silberberg and Feldt, 1968), experience in the state of Minnesota suggested that low school achievement, especially reading, was apparent equally between boys and girls. A group of delinquent girls was compared with a group of delinquent boys and approximately 60% of each group was deficient in reading (Silberberg & Silberberg, 1971, p. 20).

Research indicates a correlation between causes of reading failure and delinquency. The two conditions share certain physiological indications. Yoshi, Ishiwara, and Tani (1964) found a direct correlation between theta wave patterns on EEG's in young delinquents and habitual violence (Silberberg & Silberberg, p. 21).

Wolff and Hurwitz (1966) found a degree of high probability of minimal cerebral dysfunction in delinquents, children treated for emotional disorders and children with learning difficulties. Itader (1965) found a high degree of enuresis in a delinquent group, and this correlated with a higher level of the type of crime (Silberberg & Silberberg, p. 21).

Boshes and Mykelbust (1964) have offered information that indicates reading problems and behavioral difficulties are interrelated to neurological development. They found that when the brain involvement is on the right hemisphere, the EEG more often manifested dysfunctioning (Silberberg & Silberberg, p. 22).

Correlated Etiological Phenomena

Another variable to be considered in this correlation between school achievement and delinquency is that more boys than girls have reading problems (Silberberg & Feldt, 1968). It is also established that boys mature more slowly than girls. The hypothesis here is that a developmental lag may account for slowed theta waves which are often present in delinquents. The Gluecks (1968) considered this a definite possibility since there is a drop in the amount of criminality in the 17 to 25 age span. Frossman & Hambert (1967) stated in research that the "chromosome abnormalities are associated with cerebral abnormalities of the type known as minimum brain damage [p. 117]" (Silberberg & Silberberg, p. 23).

Because there is a high rate of delinquency in subjects whose parents were delinquent, this is also a hypothesis. The Gluecks (1968) found this correlation to be true. However, it is not clear whether this is environmental influence or inheritance of personality patterns (Silbergberg & Silberberg, p. 23).

Speculations on Typology

Rogers (1951) and others found a prominent characteristic of the delinquent child. That characteristic is in his concrete conceptual attitude. Nonabstract thought does not contribute to school success. In fact, linguistic ability is the function of intelligence which predicts high school achievement most often. Reading is a process which involves many skills not easily learned by children with low linguistic and abstract ability (Silberberg & Silberberg, p. 26).

Proposed Educational Solutions

The Gluecks (1968) found that delinquents were more able to develop skills through on-the-job training than through formalized education. Because the child with low linguistic abilities finds no place in the most important part of his life, his society, the school, it is imperative that the school find alternative channels for mainstreaming these children (Silberberg & Silberberg, p. 29).

A bookless approach to education suggests relegating reading to an isolated skill (Silberg, 1969b). Other types of teaching and learning are suggested for the actual education of the child. These would include audio-visual instruction, discussion, and other types of concrete instruction (Silberberg & Silberberg, p. 29).

II. Review of Literature Since 1971

Introduction

In the past several years as the incidence of crime and delinquency has increased, so has research in the causes and the influences of delinquency. Relationships between delinquency and factors such as intelligence,

social class, residential area and personality have been indicated. Generally the educational system has not been considered accountable. There are undoubtedly many reasons and causes why a student participates in anti-social behavior. Some of these reasons may largely be due to his educational experiences.

Legislation, both state and federal, has mandated a variety of services to the handicapped. The most well known of these is the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142). This is a landmark act. It states that every handicapped child must be provided with a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (Morgan, 1979).

Incarcerated Youth and School Achievement

Findings reveal there are a substantial number of handicapped children in juvenile correctional institutions. However the incarcerated youth is of low priority to the public. The impact of P.L. 94-142 on these children is unknown. One study found that delinquent populations deviate from normal communication processes and that most deficits were found at the integrational level. This is the level at which the child is mentally able to put together separate parts or perceptions of his environment. Also the ability to make fine visual discriminations was affected, such as between a circle and an octagon (Morgan, 1979, p. 283).

Morgan (1979) found that 42% of the populations of juvenile correction institutions are comprised of handicapped children as described in P.L. 94-142. This percentage could be inflated due to several causes, two of which could be quick evaluations in order to comply with P.L. 94-142, and extra subsidies for labeling. From evidence available Morgan feels that though there is a higher percentage of handicapped delinquents

in correctional institutions than in the general population, handicapping conditions should be considered as complicating factors rather than as causal factors of delinquency.

The Comptroller General of the United States (1977) stated that the evidence gathered indicated that youth with learning problems who fail to achieve run a risk of delinquency. In an analysis of reading achievement among a special population within an incarcerated population, Hill & Atkinson (1980) came up with data that indicated a total lack of decoding skills beyond the use of initial consonants. All of the subjects were participating in the regular curriculum. The group consisted of nine learning disabled students, five emotionally handicapped students, five mentally handicapped students and twelve students who were in the process of being evaluated for special education placement. One of the main questions not answered is: "Why weren't they identified before incarceration?"

Track Positions and Delinquency

In a study done by Kelly (1978) track position and selected outcomes does appear to exist. Track position is associated with measures of school misconduct and crime. The degree of association ranges from moderate to substantial for all acts. The low track students when contrasted against the high track appear more likely to be involved in deviant activity.

The results of this study noted the negative impact of tracking, and school in general, upon vulnerable students. If this tracking continues, the school will continue to produce a certain amount of "misfits" or "failures." How teachers and educators apply nonacademic criteria, such as attendance and motivation, in selecting students for placement in deviant career lives should also be considered (Kelly, 1978, pp. 404-405).

Responsibility of Schools as a Social Institution

It has been claimed that as early as the third grade level, teachers consider the future delinquents and non-delinquents differently. Schools have become the central point for identification of potential delinquents. This point has been emphasized so often and so frequently as to imply that schools should become the center for mental health care for children and youth (Jerse, 1978, p. 106).

Based on a study done by Jesse it appears that delinquents frequently have difficulty in academic areas. A definite cause and effect relationship was not established. However, failure in school presents the child with additional problems that may add to his leaving school and getting involved in deviant activity. The family situation of delinquent children is indicated by most studies as disrupted. The school is second only to the family as the important socialization institution. With this fact in mind, delinquency-prone students may leave school and become involved with and influenced by delinquents (Jerse, 1978, p. 109).

Socialization in school can strongly be influenced by extracurricular activities. Because interscholastic sports competition has long been an integral part of modern American schools, athletics have been assumed to influence in positive ways the overall socialization of the individual (Landers & Landers, 1978, p. 299).

In 1978 the Landers completed a study of 521 male students in a single high school pertaining to extracurricular activities and their effects on delinquency. If extracurricular activities are a source of peer prestige, those most involved in extracurricular activities should be less likely to deviate from social norms.

A lower incidence of delinquency was indicated, in this study, with individuals who participated in extracurricular activities. Students who participated in neither athletics nor service-leadership activities had a higher incidence of delinquent behavior. There was little difference between rates of delinquency by type of extracurricular activity (Landers & Landers, 1978, p. 302).

The data, in the Landers' study, did not support the contention that athletics offers socialization opportunities beyond those found in other kinds of school extracurricular programs. This information intimates that whatever life skills are learned through participation in athletics can also be acquired from other extracurricular activities. Another point to recognize is that participation in athletics and other school activities may not cause less delinquency since those who are less prone toward delinquency to begin with may be attracted to these activities.

The relationship between learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency has been identified as a concern of both practitioners and other professionals among educational, medical, and juvenile justice groups. Federal agencies are particularly interested because of the desire for prevention and control of juvenile delinquency (Swartz & Wall, 1980, p. 1).

Although there is general agreement among investigators as to the meaning of the term "learning disabilities," some variability does exist. Most often the term refers to academic achievement in arithmetic, spelling, writing and language. Learning disabilities do not include learning problems which are due to visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, to mental retardation, emotional disturbance or to environmental disadvantage (Varvariv & Campbell, 1980, pp. 4-5).

Quantitative studies on a relationship between learning disabilities

and juvenile delinquency indicate a higher incidence of learning deficits among juvenile delinquents than in the normal population (Swartz & Wall, 1980, p. 2). A study done in 1977 by the Department of Justice stated that one-fourth of the juvenile delinquents in institutions had shown evidence of learning problems (June & Alley, March, 1980, p. 149). Even higher levels of incidence have been reported (Swartz & Wall, 1980, p. 2).

Observational data also reports a causal relationship between learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency. Swartz and Wall state that there is more observational data and that it is more credible. Juvenile judges, probation officers, psychologists, educators, and medical doctors report that the delinquent youth that they encounter daily often display specific learning disabilities (Swartz & Wall, 1980, p. 2).

In a study involving a sample of 12 to 15 year olds Campbell & Varvariv found some interesting data. The total sample included 1319 youths. The learning-disabled student was found in 19.1 percent in the public school sample and 28.2 percent in the juvenile delinquent sample. There were significantly more learning-disabled students in the juvenile delinquent sample than in the public school sample (Campbell & Varvariv, 1980, p. 26). Low motivation and lack of learning opportunity did not appear as explanations of delinquent behavior (Campbell & Varvariv, 1980, p. 31).

Correlated Etiological Phenomena

There are many theories to explain lack of school achievement and juvenile delinquency. Evidence indicates there is common etiology for both of them. The "peer involvement variable" plays an important role. Low track students may find it necessary to align themselves with their peers and participate in deviant activities. These activities can result in peer approval. Kelly (1978) found in his study that almost three-quarters of

the students became involved in school misconduct because of peer pressure (p. 399).

Family background and student achievement should also be considered as a causal factor of low school achievement and juvenile delinquency. The concentration of poverty is more closely related than poverty per se (Levine, Keeny, Kukuk, Fort, Mares & Stephenson, 1979, pp. 63-64). Youngsters in inner-city schools suffer many educational disadvantages associated not with just the low income level of their families but also with poor housing conditions, high crime rates and high family disorganization (Levine et al, 1979, p. 76).

Results of a study by Swartz & Wall (1980, p. 7) suggest that social class should be considered an important variable in the relationship between learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency. Evidence shows that social class variables are causal in nature, and that children having certain class characteristics, also identified as learning disabled, should be considered high risk for delinquency (Swartz & Wall, 1980, p. 8). Another key concept in understanding a student's lifestyle is the assessment of family constellation, especially with order and ordinal position. The sibling competitor is an important perception in family constellation. The brother or sister identified as the competitor would be the individual most different in character, interest, and temperament. The area where the competitor appears the most successful is the area where the sibling withdraws. The sibling will move in to fill the vacuum where the competitor failed (Nield & Taylor, 1980, p. 1). By being able to identify discouraged students who may develop delinquent tendencies at an early age would make preventive measures possible (Nield & Taylor, 1980, p. 5).

Speculations on Typology

Academic underachievement, especially in the area of reading, has been associated with delinquent behavior (Jerse, 1978, p. 109). The reading problems appeared to result from perceptual disturbances. Visual-perceptual deficits also have been associated with neurologically impaired children who showed antisocial behavior disorders (Zinkust & Gottlieb, 1979). Evidence indicates that deficiencies in attention span may inhibit learning generally and reading in particular (Hill et al, 1980, p. 4).

The mean age for auditory measures was lower for the delinquent learners in a study by Hill (1980) than were visual measures. The delinquent learners retained the materials presented via the visual modality better than the materials presented by the auditory modality (Hill, et al, 1980, p. 10).

The issue of attention span as it relates to juvenile offenders is supported in the study by Hill (1980). Attention span, academic achievement, handicapping conditions and juvenile delinquency appear to be interrelated. The findings support previous evidence that attention span is a critical variable in learning (Hill et al, 1980, p. 14).

Proposed Educational Solutions

The approaches to educating these young people are varied in terms of techniques and successes. Teachers face three basic behavior problems in dealing with delinquent students. The majority come from anxiety which appears in the form of defiance, low self-concepts and inappropriate social behaviors. The second problem is inattentiveness which results in short attention spans with minimum work output. The third is hyper-activity and attention-seeking behaviors (Mainprize & Mann, 1977, p. 403).

A further study should be made of the actual services provided under P.L. 94-142 to handicapped children in correctional institutions. Screening

devices and tests employed by each state in determining handicapping conditions would be advantageous (Morgan, 1979).

Caution must be observed to avoid labeling children with academic deficiencies as "pre-delinquent." However, there is strong evidence that a relationship between them exists. Corrective and preventive interventions might reduce the chances of school personnel contributing to delinquency. These interventions can help the child reach his potential and be a happier, healthier human being (Jerse & Fakouri, 1978, p. 109).

The results of a study by Finch (1977, p. 211) point out that socially and emotionally maladjusted children often have higher creative potential than socially and emotionally adjusted children. Perhaps in the therapy of delinquent youngsters identification and development of creative potential should be explored.

Since the visual modality was higher than the auditory modality among all the groups in one study, additional visual stimuli would be useful in augmenting traditional content-ladened lectures. These could include the following: charts, posters, transparencies, lecture notes, outlines, microcomputers, calculators, movies, graphs, models and role playing. This list is by no means conclusive (Hill et al, 1980, p. 15).

Findings indicate that some youth do develop coping styles in school subjects even though other symptoms would classify them as learning-disabled. These findings also indicate that these students show more evidence of coping skills than students who are delinquent. Coping styles should be modeled and developed and delinquency might be avoided (Varvariv & Campbell, 1980, p. 30).

Summary

In reviewing the literature it appears that the work done in the field of school achievement and delinquency in the last ten years reflects

many previous findings. It is still believed that delinquent students show a strong dislike for school. Reading deficiencies remain apparent in students who display anti-social behavior. Family background seems to remain a possible causal factor in academic failure and delinquent behavior.

A lag in neurological development and deficiencies in attention span are still evident in students with anti-social behavior disorders.

New findings have found that Public Law 94-142 must be dealt with. This law must provide a free and appropriate education for all students. The delinquent youngster cannot be ignored under this act. In studies by the federal government it has been determined that youth who have a low success rate are very vulnerable to participating in delinquent behavior; and that one-fourth of juvenile delinquents in institutions show evidence of learning problems.

The school is presently found second only to the family as the most important influence on socialization processes. Tracking students into low tracks appears to not be a viable educational alternative. Rather the school needs to look at the positive influence of athletics and other extracurricular activities; and that life skills can be learned through these extracurricular activities. Students can find peer approval through these activities rather than in anti-social activities.

Public Law 94-142 states that a "Designated Specially Designed Vocational Education and Career Development" must be provided (Title 5 Regulations, p. 39). Earlier studies found that delinquents were more able to develop skills through on-the-job training. It is now mandated that skills be offered that will develop education and career development, using the Department of Rehabilitation, other agencies and the community.

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